

The Spreading of “Auld Lang Syne” and Jakobson’s Three Types of Translation*

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“Auld Lang Syne”, one of the most famous poems on friendship, was recorded by the Scottish poet Robert Burns in 1788. And ever since it has a worldwide spreading among different races in different areas, and in various forms for different uses. But so far there are no reseaches done on its spreading, especially on its various spreading forms. Based on its more than 200 years verbal and non-verbal sign spreading systems, with the famous Russian-American linguist Roman Jakobson’s three types of translation as the theoretical framework, this paper identifies how “Auld Lang Syne” has been spread linguistically by focusing on the intralingual translation of “Auld Lang Syne”, the interlingual translation of “Auld Lang Syne”, and the intersemiotic translation of “Auld Lang Syne” with its intralingual translation explained by the vocabulary changes in its English version, its interlingual translation by its title in different Chinese versions, and its intersemiotic translation by the non-verbal signs of music, film, and painting. The conclusion is that “Auld Lang Syne” has been spread mainly in the forms of translation, corresponding to Jakobson’s three types of translation, and the spreading power of intersemiotic translation is no less than that of interlingual translation, “translation proper” described by Jakobson.

Keywords: “Auld Lang Syne”, spreading, Jakobson’s three types of translation

Introduction

The Scottish poem “Auld Lang Syne”, with the theme on friendship, originally was in the form of a folk song. It was Robert Burns (1759-1796) who first spread it by noting it down “from an old man’s singing” (Drabble, 2005, p. 51) in 1788 and contributed it to the fifth volume of James Johnson’s “Scots Musical Museum” (1787-1803).

And ever since it has been enjoying a worldwide spreading among differnet races in different areas, and in various forms for different uses.

The various spreading forms of “Auld Lang Syne” refer to the verbal signs of the same language or different languages, and the non-verbal signs. As for the verbal signs of “Auld Lang Syne” in Scots, quite often it appears as a selected reading in the textbook for college students majoring in literature in both English

* There are several terms for Jakobson’s categorical statements of translation made in his “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation” in 1959. In his writing, “three ways of interpreting a verbal sign”, “three kinds of translation”, and “classification” are used; “three categories of translation” (p. 5) is a term describing it by Jeremy Munday in his “Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications” (2001/2010); “three types of translation” (p. 5) is from “Translation—An advanced resource book” (2004/2010) by Hatim and Munday. In the present writing, “three types of translation” is adopted for it is the latest term, and it can be initiated as 3T.

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speaking world and non-English speaking countries. For its verbal signs of the same language, the original folk song, Burns' original (Scots verse) in 1788,¹ and its English translation can be grouped in. As for the verbal signs of the different languages, there are non-English translations of "Auld Lang Syne", such as the translations in Chinese, in Japanese, in German, etc.. As for the non-verbal signs, the forms are music, film, or painting derived from "Auld Lang Syne" (*Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, n.d.).

However, the research on "Auld Lang Syne" is far behind its worldwide spreading. There are almost no reseaches done on its spreading so far, especially researches on its various spreading forms. So in this paper, with its more than 200 years verbal and non-verbal sign spreading system, the author is to identify how "Auld Lang Syne" has been spread linguistically based on the famous Russian-American linguist Roman Jakobson's three types of translation.

Jakobson's Three Types of Translation

Roman Jakobson (1896-1982) is a famous Russian-American linguist, one of the contributions made by him is the categorical statement of three types of translation, that is, intralingual translation, interlingual translation, and intersemiotic translation described in his seminal paper "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation".

Jakobson's three types of translation are as follows: (1) intralingual translation, or "rewording": "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language"; (2) interlingual translation, or "translation proper": "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language"; and (3) intersemiotic translation, or "transmutation": "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of non-verbal sign system" (Jakobson, 1959/2000, p. 114).

Intralingual translation would occur when an expression or a text is rephrased in the same language to explain or clarify something which has been said or written. Interlingual translation which is the traditional, although by no means exclusive, focuses on translation studies. Intersemiotic translation would occur when a text is translated, for example, into music, film, or painting (Munday, 2001/2010, p. 5).

The involved elements in Jakobson's three types of translation are verbal signs and non-verbal sign system, which correspond to the various spreading forms of "Auld Lang Syne". So let us come to the examination of the various spreading forms of "Auld Lang Syne" with Jakobson's three types of translation, namely, intralingual translation, interlingual translation, and intersemiotic translation.

The Three Types of Translation of "Auld Lang Syne"

For more than 200 years, "Auld Lang Syne" has been spread in various forms, either in the verbal signs of the same language or different languages, or in the non-verbal sign system of music, film, or painting. With Jakobson's three types of translation, its spreading will be discussed from the intralingual translation of "Auld Lang Syne", the interlingual translation of "Auld Lang Syne", and the intersemiotic translation of "Auld Lang Syne".

The Intralingual Translation of "Auld Lang Syne"

When an expression in "Auld Lang Syne" is rephrased in Scots to explain or clarify something, it is an

¹ The original of "Auld Lang Syne", in a common sense, refers to Burn's rewriting in 1788. But it origins from a ballard, or a folk song, thus, the ballard "Auld Lang Syne" before included in "Scots Musical Museum" is the original in the oral form and Burn's rewriting is the original in the written form.

intralingual translation of “Auld Lang Syne”, an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language.

To explain the intralingual translation of “Auld Lang Syne”, at least two things should be discussed, Burns’ rewriting of the old song in 1788 and the English translation of Burns’ original (Scots verse).

The intralingual translation of “Auld Lang Syne” occurred when Burns sent a copy of “Auld Lang Syne” to the “Scots Musical Museum” with the remark “The following song, an old song, of the olden times, and which has never been in print, nor even in manuscript until I took it down from an old man” (*Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, n.d.).

The old song, or the Scottish folk song is the oral form of verbal sings, and Burns’ rewriting of the old song is the written form of verbal sings, both of them are Scots.

And the English translation of “Auld Lang Syne” based on Burns’ original (Scots verse) is an intralingual translation. “The language we call Scots has a common origin with English in that it is in large measure derived from the speech of the Anglian peoples who settled in northern Morthumbria” (Woodring & Shapiro, 2005, p. 81).

Table 1

Vocabulary of Burns’ Original (Scots Verse) and the English Translation of “Auld Lang Syne”

Burns’ original	auld	Jo	tak	o’	ye	stowp	twa	hae	braes	pu’d	gowans
English translation	old	dear	take	of	buy	cup	two	have	slopes	picked	daisies
Burns’ original	mony	fit	sin	paidl’d	burn	frae	braid	fiere	gie’s	gude-willy	waught
English translation	many	foot	since	paddled	stream	from	broad	friend	give me	good-will	draught

Note. Source: Based on Burns’ original (Scots verse) and the English translation of “Auld Lang Syne” (*Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, n.d.).

From Table 1, we can see at least 22 words changed in English translation, but they are close enough to Scots in spelling.

Woodring and Shapiro (2005) have explained “English and Scots’ close enough in spelling” in “The Columbia History of British Poetry”:

Scots developed differently from English in many ways because it preserved certain vowels, a considerable vocabulary and grammar of Anglo-Saxon, that were changed or lost in English. However, English was close enough to Scots to be fully intelligible to educated Scots people. (p. 81)

From Burns’ original (Scots verse) and the English translation of “Auld Lang Syne”, the changes of vowels and vocabulary occur resulting from the intralingual translation, but no grammatical change occurs.

“English was close enough to Scots to be fully intelligible” can also give an account for the original Scottish title of “Auld Lang Syne” kept in the English translation. It is a kind of zero translation that some word in the original is transferred to the target language for cultural, geographical, or other reasons, but the reason for the transference of “Auld Lang Syne” to English is just because English is close enough to Scots.

Since the translation of “Auld Lang Syne” from Scots to English is an intralingual translation, as what are discussed above, only some rewording, changes of vowels, almost no changes of grammar and sentence structure occur, some in Burns’ original (Scots verse) are even kept in English translation because Scots and English have

the common origin.

The Interlingual Translation of “Auld Lang Syne”

When Burns' original (Scots verse) is put into a non-English language, an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language, it is an interlingual translation of “Auld Lang Syne”. Here the “verbal sign” refers to both oral and written verbal signs.

Let us come to an example for the oral interlingual translation of “Auld Lang Syne”. On November 30, 2009, students and staff at the University of Glasgow sang the song in 41 different languages simultaneously (*Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, n.d.). Actually, this is a multilingual rather than an interlingual translation of “Auld Lang Syne”.

As for the written interlingual translation of “Auld Lang Syne”, all the translated works introduced in translation studies are results of this type. The translations of “Auld Lang Syne” into a non-English language, such as Chinese translation, Japanese translation, and German translation can be described as an interpretation of “Auld Lang Syne” verbal signs by means of some other language, which is the “translation proper” defined by Jakobson, thus, the focus of translation studies. That is why we can read both traditional and contemporary writings on the translation of “Auld Lang Syne”.

Here we may take the title translation of “Auld Lang Syne” in Chinese for example. The well accepted Chinese versions for the title of “Auld Lang Syne” are “Lige” 《骊歌》 translated by HUA Wen-xian, “Xirishiguang” 《昔日时光》 (“Days in the past”) by WANG Zuo-liang, “Youyidijiutianchang” 《友谊地久天长》 (“Friendship lasts forever”) by DENG Ying-yi, “Youyiwanhui” 《友谊万岁》 (“Long live, Friendship!”) from *the free encyclopedia of Wikipedia* (Chinese edition).

The Chinese version “Xirishiguang” 《昔日时光》 (“Days in the past”) is a literal translation in a traditional description, and the description for it from translation studies is a covert translation.

And the traditional description for the other Chinese titles of “Auld Lang Syne” is a free translation, and the term “overt translation” is the description from translation studies for them. So it is clear that the change of an interlingual translation of “Auld Lang Syne” is not only in verbal signs, but also in structure, in rhetoric devices and others. This is why Jakobson describes interlingual translation as a “translation proper”.

The Intersemiotic Translation of “Auld Lang Syne”

The intersemiotic translation of “Auld Lang Syne” refers to an interpretation of verbal signs by means of non-verbal sign system, that is, an oral or written one adapted to audio-visual form, such as music, film, or painting. But the intersemiotic translation of “Auld Lang Syne” sometimes also refers to an interpretation of the non-verbal signs within its system. With its more than 200 years spreading, thanks to the newly produced music instruments, quite often it is hard to tell whether a piece relating to “Auld Lang Syne” is derived from its verbal signs or non-verbal sign system.

The tune or melody of “Auld Lang Syne” has been performed on various occasions. One is that on June 30, 1997, the tune was played by the silver and pipe bands from the Royal Hong Kong Police Force, at the departure of Hong Kong's 28th and last British Governor, Chris Patten, from his official residence, Government House, Hong Kong (*Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, n.d.).

The use of “Auld Lang Syne” in film and television series as the theme song or music is a case in point for

the interpretation of verbal sign or non-verbal sign adapted to non-verbal sign. The song and its melody were mainly voiced by human beings 200 years ago, since then they have been produced especially by film soundtracks from the very early days of “talking” pictures to the present—hundreds of films and television series’ episodes. Among them, the most famous are the theme tune of the classic movie *Waterloo Bridge* (1940) and the theme song in the film *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946), which have spread “Auld Lang Syne” as far as they have been.

The intersemiotic translation of “Auld Lang Syne” also includes the painting from non-verbal sign system. A painting related to “Auld Lang Syne” refers to some object, such as currency, or posters for performances with verbal signs of “Auld Lang Syne” on it.

Here are examples of the coin or note with the verbal sings of “Auld Lang Syne”.

In 1996, the Isle of Man issued a four coin set of Crown pieces on the theme of “Auld Lang Syne”. In 2009, the Royal Mint issued a commemorative two pound coin featuring a quote from “Auld Lang Syne” (*Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, n.d.). Currency, a means for financial liquidity, surely carries “Auld Lang Syne” where it goes.

The intersemiotic translation of “Auld Lang Syne” is far beyond Jakobson’s description in 1959, and it has posed a challenge to Jakobson’s view of interlingual translation as “translation proper”, for its spreading power of intersemiotic translation is no less than that of its interlingual translation.

Conclusion

The various spreading forms of “Auld Lang Syne” have been examined with Jakobson’s three types of translation by focusing on the intralingual translation of “Auld Lang Syne”, the interlingual translation of “Auld Lang Syne”, and the intersemiotic translation of “Auld Lang Syne”.

In the intralingual translation of “Auld Lang Syne”, to explain only the vowels and vocabulary changes occur in English version, a list for the vocabulary changes in the English version is put in a table. As for the interlingual translation of “Auld Lang Syne”, with a brief of the translations of “Auld Lang Syne” in different languages, the different titles of “Auld Lang Syne” in Chinese are discussed to explain the “traditional”, even “morden” features of interlingual translation. And for the intersemiotic translation “Auld Lang Syne”, non-verbal signs are examined in the categories of music, film, and painting, showing that the power of intersemiotic translation is no less than interlingual translation.

The conclusion is that “Auld Lang Syne” has been spread in the forms of translation because its various spreading forms correspond to Jakobson’s three types of translation, namely, intralingual translation, interlingual translation, and intersemiotic translation. And the categorization of its more than 200 years spreading falls into the three types of translation described by Jakobson.

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